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PAPER

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Requests in Indian and Sri Lankan English

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Abstract

Despite notable exceptions, research on requests in world Englishes has so far largely involved role plays, questionnaires and discourse completion tasks. Moreover, research on requests in South Asian varieties of English is rather scarce. Therefore, the present study employs a multifactorial approach towards requests in Indian and Sri Lankan English as compared to their historical input variety British English by investigating the spoken components of the International Corpus of English, hence involving authentic, non-intuition-based empirical data. Based on a conditional inference tree and a random forest extended via the integration of interaction predictors, the present article concludes that quantitative differences in the realisation patterns of requests in British, Indian and Sri Lankan English can be observed.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Requests are one of the most central speech acts in everyday human interaction. They are used 'in order to make somebody do something' (Flöck, 2016, p. 1) and are thus 'sensitive to politeness' (Leech, 2014, p. 134). Viewed as generally face-threatening by some scholars (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Leech, 2014), speakers need to be specifically attentive with requests as their acceptability is sensitive to cultural, social and linguistic factors. Thus, it is likely for requests to be realised and perceived differently depending on the speech community. Therefore, an investigation of influential factors (structural, contextual and sociobiographic) on the choice of one request strategy over another in various varieties of English promises to provide valuable insights into cross-cultural request behaviour.

While earlier studies on politeness and requests conducted foundational research concerning possible requesting patterns (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Leech, 1983), they had an inherent bias towards Western cultures, and realisation patterns in 'non-native' varieties of English have so far widely concentrated on non-empirical data (Kachru, 1981).

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Therefore, the present paper zooms in on the politeness-sensitive speech act of requests in two postcolonial varieties of English, Indian English (IndE) and Sri Lankan English (SLE), as compared to British English (BrE). Scholarly attention on both IndE and SLE has thus far centred around structural features (Bernaisch, 2015; Meyler, 2007; Mukherjee, 2008; Senaratne, 2009) and not – despite notable exceptions (Funke, 2020) – on research in the linguistic field of pragmatics. An investigation of both IndE and SLE compared to their historical input variety is worth undertaking in order to find possible requesting patterns unique for: (i) either of the South Asian varieties on their own; or (ii) South Asian varieties as a whole, distinct from BrE.

The present paper offers a theoretical overview of previous studies on structural, contextual and sociobiographic factors influencing request realisations in (varieties of) English and other languages. Against this background, the research questions of this paper are presented at the end of the following section. Thereafter, the paper covers the data and methodology used in order to contribute answers to said research questions. Relying on conditional inference trees and random forest analyses, section 4 reports the empirical findings, which are discussed with a focus on variety-specific differences in section 5. The final section concludes on the central results and present avenues for future research in the field of pragmatics in world Englishes.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON REQUESTS

2.1 | Structural realisations of requests

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) divide every request into three possible parts: (i) address terms to attract the hearer's attention; (ii) a head act, which is the primary act of requesting; and (iii) adjuncts (for instance further explanations on why the request was uttered; Example (1)).

(1). (i) Danny / (ii) could you lend me £100 for a week / (iii) I've run into problems with the rent for my apartment (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984, p. 200).

Furthermore, they provide a general categorisation of degrees of (in)directness in requests:

(2) Direct: *Tell me the time, please.*
(3) Conventionally indirect: *Could you tell me the time, please?*
(4) Non-conventionally indirect: *I wish I knew what time it is.*

While direct request strategies (2) include the head act, which performs the request via the inclusion of a performative verb, conventionally indirect requests (3) engage the hearer's willingness to understand that – as in this case here – the speaker is not interested in the hearer's ability to tell the time in general, but there must be something more to the speaker's utterance than what is being said. The cognitive process involved in identifying (4) as a request is more elaborate than in (3), which is why the request is non-conventionally indirect. Moreover, (4) could have been realised in many different ways; there are no limits as to what counts as a non-conventionally indirect request. Naturally, possible preferences for one or the other strategy vary from culture to culture or inter- and intraspeaker variation might play a role, most likely depending on the face wants speakers try to adhere to.

Leech (2014) provides five categories of request strategies that can roughly be mapped onto earlier categorisations (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Sifianou, 1992) of direct requests, conventionally indirect requests and non-conventionally indirect requests. While the former stay the same in Leech's typology and refer to requests that 'convey the directive meaning directly' (Leech, 2014, p. 147) (as in (5)), the latter cover Leech's category of hints as off-record indirect requests (as in (6)).

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(5) Bring me a cup of tea.
(6) Oh dear, I can't find my laptop (Leech, 2014, p. 158)

Additionally, within the traditional conventionally indirect request category, Leech makes a difference between on-record indirect strategies – namely statements and questions ((7) and (8)) – and nonsentential strategies (9) (Leech, 2014, pp. 148–156)

(7) You must record testing times for all three tests.
(8) Can you entertain the kids while I'm away?
(9) Tickets please.

On-record indirect requests include modal auxiliaries such as *can*, *could*, *must* or *might*, the imposition of which depends on whether the request is formulated as a statement or a question and moves gradually along a continuum of prediction, obligation, volition and ability/possibility, with questions mostly found between the latter two. Leech (2014) suggests that requests are not easily distinguishable from other directive speech acts, especially when located at either end of the continuum. For example, *You must leave* can be seen as a command, whereas *You may leave* could be a suggestion. Even imperatives – which Leech counts as ways of requesting directly – are not always requests. *Have a rest* could count as an invitation or an offer (Leech, 2014, p. 147). Put differently, the use of an imperative does not determine an utterance to be a request. The defining property of a request is thus not necessarily its structural realisation as an imperative, but the fact that – while bringing benefit to the speaker – a request comes at the cost of the hearer (Leech, 2014), independent of its structural realisation. Nevertheless, most research on requests proposes a three-way distinction of structural request realisations.

For instance, Kemper and Thissen (1981) propose three structural realisations of requests that can take the form of a declarative (*The salt is too far for me to reach.*), an imperative (*Pass the salt!*) or an interrogative (*Would you mind passing the salt?*). Each of these realisations can be accompanied by mitigators that soften the request's imposition (Kemper & Thissen, 1981). Sometimes, through the use of mitigators, a rather direct request may be perceived as less direct and less imposing.

In her work on requests in American English (AmE) and BrE, Flöck (2016) offers a detailed categorisation of mitigating modifiers to appeal to either the hearer's negative or positive face. Each categorisation includes syntactic, lexical/phrasal and external mitigating modifiers. Figure 1. depicts a condensed version of Flöck's categorisation of lexical/phrasal mitigating modifiers, providing examples extracted from the ICE corpus where possible.

2.2 | Contextual factors influencing request realisations

Contextual factors that are relevant for the present paper are the setting in which a request is uttered and face wants that the speakers adhere to (or not). Request strategies might differ depending on whether speakers realise requests in a private setting or in a public setting. In the present study, the former refers to conversations with interlocutors the speaker knows well while the latter refers to settings that involve interlocutors the speaker is unfamiliar with or socially distant to.

Brown and Levinson's (1978) approach on politeness includes social distance (D), social power difference (P) and the perceived heaviness of the imposition (R) to determine a request's acceptability. Though they do not account for views on (polite) requesting behaviour in 'non-native' English speech communities, the DPR distinction (Figure 2) suggests that in public settings – when social distance between interlocutors is high – requests will be realised differently, namely more indirectly, than in private settings with low social distance between the interlocutors. Thus, the evaluation of speaker behaviour is closely linked to the degree of indirectness employed in the utterance: the higher D, P and R, the more indirect the utterance needs to be in order to be evaluated as polite.

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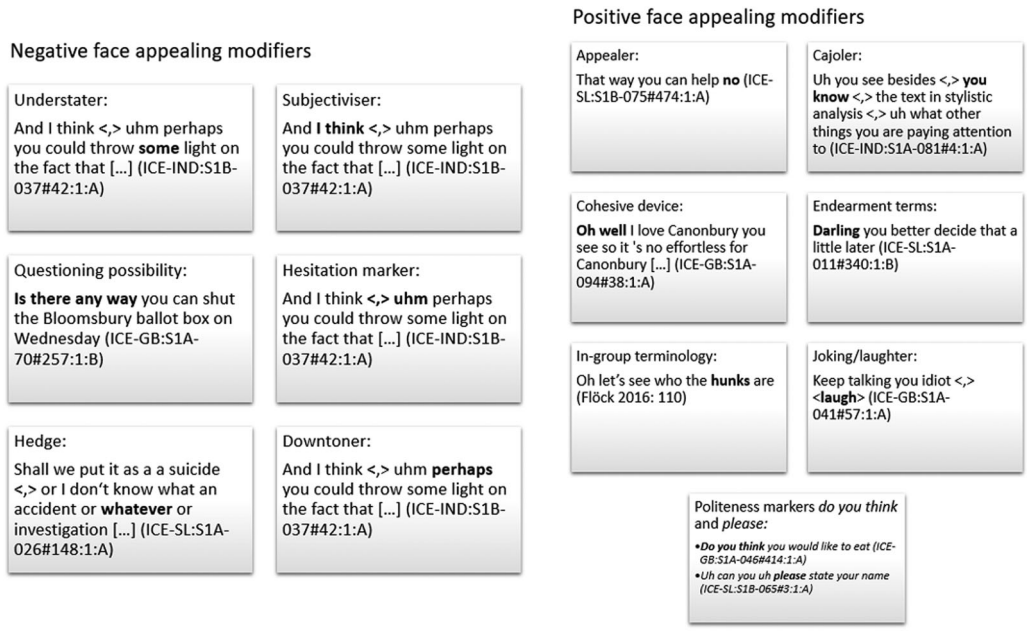

FIGURE 1 Mitigating modifiers according to Flöck (2016, pp. 108–110)

FIGURE 2 DPR influence on indirectness and politeness (according to Brown & Levinson, 1978)

However, indirectness does not have to equal politeness in all speech communities. The necessary consequence for requests is that while

> requesting is a universal communicative function, the actual means of requesting are far from universal. Different languages, or even varieties of the same language, might have different linguistic and non-linguistic strategies at their disposal and may differ in their perceptions about which strategy is appropriate in which situation (Flöck, 2016, p. 1).

Leech (1983) agreed that the perceived degree of politeness – and hence the acceptability of a request – stands in close connection with the perceived indirectness of the utterance, but in later works (Leech, 2014, p. 134) he hints at possible sociopragmatic reasons for the tendency of English 'to favo[u]r indirectness of requests more than most other

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languages, indirectness here being closely connected with politeness', namely the fact that 'English-speaking cultures give prominence' to what he calls 'neg-politeness' (which has the function of 'mitigation, to reduce or lessen possible causes of offense' (Leech, 2014, p. 11). This explains why 'native' or 'standardised' varieties of English show varying levels of preference for indirectness (as shown by Flöck, 2016, who takes into account discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and conversational corpus data and concludes that BrE speakers opt for indirectness even more frequently than speakers of AmE), but do not prefer directness. Yet, this approach still ignores the fact that there are 'standardised' varieties of English spoken in non-traditional English-speaking cultures, such as English in South Asia. Leech's proposed categorisation of request strategies can, thus, serve as a basis, but has to be treated with caution and needs to be re-evaluated for its applicability once a culturally more heterogeneous corpus database is taken into account. Moreover, it needs to be kept in mind that no study on requests can include all possible devices of requesting as speakers 'can always think of less usual ways to request' (Leech, 2014, p. 178).

Another contextual factor influencing request behaviour is face. Face can be described as 'the public self-image of a person' (Yule, 1996, p. 60) that speakers would like 'to be upheld by society' (Watts, 2003, p. 105). Speakers show they are aware of their interlocutors' face and their face wants by behaving accordingly and, thus, adhere to certain politeness principles in order to show respect to two types of face wants: positive face wants (the need to feel like a valued and accepted social group member) and negative face wants (the desire to be independent and free in one's decisions) (Yule, 1996).

Brown and Levinson (1978) state that requests signify face-threatening acts (FTA) to the hearer's negative face. Their model suggests that positive politeness strategies are generally less face-threatening than negative politeness strategies, but it does not allow for possible movements on their politeness scale depending on, for example, politeness markers in requests. Example (10) – a request involving a negative politeness strategy – is clearly less face-threatening due to its structural realisation and the inclusion of the politeness marker *please* than (11).

(10) Would you mind closing the door, *please*?
(11) Let's watch a movie now!

Furthermore, frequent critique of Brown and Levinson's theory is concerned with the theory's Anglo-Saxon centredness and thus its non-applicability to other languages and cultures. This is addressed in the following section.

2.3 | Sociocultural factors influencing request realisations

All of the above-mentioned studies were conducted on first-language varieties of English, such as BrE or AmE. This has led to a bias towards Anglo-Saxon request realisations present in research and hence to an inherently Western view on the politeness of requests that has been criticised and tackled by various cross-cultural studies on requests since the 1980s (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Fukushima, 1996; Kallia, 2005; Márquez Reiter, 2000; Wierzbicka, 1985; Yeung, 1997). All of them come to the conclusion that the cultural background of speakers leads them to perceive (im)polite behaviour in a unique way and that requests are structurally realised accordingly. Indirectness might not equal politeness in every culture. Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) investigated conventional indirectness in English, German, French, Hebrew and Spanish with the help of DCTs. Their results show that all languages in their study prefer conventionally indirect requests – oftentimes realised with the help of modal auxiliaries – throughout different situations as they are considered to be more polite and, hence, most successful. In a sub-study of the CCSARP on requests in English and Hebrew, Blum-Kulka (1987) shows speakers of both languages perceive the most direct strategy as impolite, yet the highest degree of politeness and acceptability is not achieved by the most indirect strategy (mild hints – a non-conventionally indirect strategy), but by the conventional indirectness strategy. However, not all cultures opt for conventionally indirect requests as the most favourable option. Thus, conventional indirectness might only be a universal 'pragmatic regularit[y]' (Blum-Kulka et al., p. 9) in speech communities

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that value this kind of request strategy. In fact, 'the relationship between indirectness and politeness is interpreted differently across cultures' (Ogiermann, 2009, p. 189) and, coinciding with the speech communities' geographical location, requests threatening the hearer's face can become more prominent. Other studies (Tsuzuki et al., 2005, p. 285) state that depending on location it might even be conventional to realise requests directly and that 'by examining the priority of the use of the imperative, [one] can explore the sociocultural precedence of positive/negative politeness in each society'. While in some Western cultures, for example the British culture, imperatives and directness might not be as acceptable, both can be perfectly acceptable in some Asian cultures (Tsuzuki et al., 2005) – though the specific context, the degree of closeness between the speakers as well as sociobiographic factors such as gender and age play an important role in the evaluation process.

The influence of gender on request choices is anything but homogeneous. Some studies proclaim a gender difference, stating that men show 'assertive, control behavio[u]r' while women are more 'prosocial [and] affiliative' when requesting for help (Bresnahan, 1993, p. 22) in accordance with socially accepted norms of gendered request patterns. When requesting information in interview situations, female speakers realise requests indirectly more often and for different purposes than male speakers (Macaulay, 2001). Taking English and Greek female and male speech into account, Kouletaki (2005) finds women to be more aware of a request's face-threatening potential and to request indirectly more often than men unless the request takes on a conventionally accepted direct form. Other studies cannot find any difference between female and male speech (Ishikawa, 2013; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2003). Still, earlier research – despite differences in their empirical bases (questionnaires or DCTs in limited settings; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Márquez Reiter, 2000) – warrants investigating gender as a sociolinguistic variable in corpus-based examinations of requests.

Age has thus far been investigated with regard to the cognitive capability of children to formulate requests at a certain age (Carrell, 1981), yet a study on age as a factor determining the choice of one request strategy over another in different varieties of English is still pending. Nevertheless, various studies on politeness in general have shown that '[g]eneration-specific views of (im)politeness hold that different generations talk and behave differently […]' (Kienpointner & Stopfner, 2017, p. 73). Therefore, the present paper includes speaker age as a factor possibly relevant for the choice of request strategy in two South Asian English varieties, namely IndE and SLE.

Both South Asian varieties are often used in rather non-Westernised cultural contexts that might influence how request strategies are realised in the English language. Empirical studies show that IndE and SLE often share structural similarities with each other but not with their historic input variety BrE (Gries & Bernaisch, 2016, on the dative alternation) – though sometimes the 'two South Asian varieties […] are markedly different from each other, with one of the two clustering together with BrE' (Schilk et al., 2012, p. 163). IndE – as the oldest postcolonial variety in South Asia – has received more scholarly attention than other varieties. Using an elicitation questionnaire approach involving undergraduate university students, Sridhar (1991) finds that IndE speakers make use of request strategies based on request patterns of Indian languages. Though IndE speakers use modal auxiliaries to realise requests, they do not make a (politeness) distinction between them; for example, *will* is not considered less polite than any other modal while BrE speakers might consider it too direct (Sridhar, 1991). The same holds true for the use of imperative constructions as in many Indian languages the imperative verbs carry honorific markers (Valentine, 1996). Additionally, when using imperative constructions, IndE speakers prefer structures with inclusive language, such as *let's* (Valentine, 1996). Furthermore, speakers of IndE seem to be aware of culture-specific request patterns and their implications for politeness since IndE speakers use less direct constructions in Westernised contexts (Sridhar, 1991; Tinkham, 1993) and, generally speaking, Non-Westernised IndE speakers – Indian speakers with less exposure to the English-speaking world outside their own country – use direct constructions more often than Westernised speakers. Though Tinkham's study is based on the speech of Indian novel characters, it shows that IndE speakers are aware of differences in requesting strategies across IndE and other varieties of English as otherwise this would not have been made visible in the novels. Moreover, IndE speakers mark politeness in requests through a more frequent use of the honorific *Sir* compared to BrE (Jenkins, 2009) and an extensive use of the pragmatic particle *please* (Mehrotra, 1995), the word *kind(ly)* or the performative verb *request* (Parasher, 2001). In general, 'what is perceived as a command in BrE is generally understood

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as [a] request in IndE' (Mehrotra, 1995, p. 102). For instance, *Shut the door, please.* counts as a command in BrE despite the use of *please*, but IndE speakers perceive it as a polite request (Mehrotra, 1995).

Although in-depth research into politeness and requests in SLE still needs to be undertaken, research on Sinhala is available – the largest native language in Sri Lanka, which is likely to influence politeness and request realisations in SLE. Qualitatively analysing data from spoken Sinhala, Premawardhena (2007, p. 214) notices that 'the unwritten rules of politeness […] are more significant in spoken discourse', which specifically apply to, for example, greeting forms, the speakers' awareness of being part of a collective unit, requests, indirectness and gender differences. Speakers usually try to make a request more appealing to the hearer by using expressions such as *anee* (*please*), *puluwan-da* (*Could you?*), the word *just* or diminutive adjectives (Premawardhena, 2007). Especially women are said to show a more frequent use of particles like *anee*. Consequently, SLE speakers might show a more frequent use of *please* and *could you* when formulating requests due to similar expressions and usage in Sinhala.

In sum, based on the small amount of non-empirical research on requests in South Asian Englishes, it can be suggested that both IndE and SLE might exhibit at least some variety-specific features in their request patterns. Previous research moreover suggests that sociobiographic factors such as age and gender play a role in the choice of request strategy. The present study thus aims to provide corpus-based proof of that by answering the research questions formulated in the following.

2.4 | Research questions

The overwhelming majority of research on requests adopts an Anglo-Saxon Westernised perspective on request realisations and neglects speech communities with cultural backgrounds that do not value indirectness as much as Western cultures, such as Eastern English second- and foreign-language countries. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to look into possible unique requesting strategies in IndE and SLE compared to their historical input variety BrE in order to investigate whether the speakers' sociocultural background and other factors influence request realisations. Against the theoretical background of this paper, the following research questions arise:

1. Are there differences in the usage patterns of requests by speakers of the two South Asian varieties as compared to speakers of BrE?
2. With regard to direct and indirect requests, do South Asian speakers show a preference for either of the two that separates them from speakers of BrE?
3. Which factors guide the speakers' choices of realising a request as direct or indirect?

In order to contribute answers to these research questions, the data and methodology used in the present study is introduced in the next section.

3 | DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 | The International Corpus of English (ICE)

This study is rooted in the spoken parts of three national components of the International Corpus of English (ICE), namely ICE-Great Britain (ICE-GB), ICE-India (ICE-IND) and ICE-Sri Lanka (ICE-SL). Each national component includes private and public dialogues as well as scripted and unscripted monologues, making up a total of 300 texts with approximately 2,000 words each. Though requests can theoretically be found in monologues, they are more likely to occur in interaction with other speakers. Especially within a world Englishes context, it seems more productive to deal with natural spoken language as it happens between interlocutors because variation based on possible L1s and

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TABLE 1 Corpus design of the spoken dialogue parts in ICE (University College London Website (2020) on ICE Corpus Design)

Private (100)	Public (80)
Face-to-face conversations (90)	Classroom Lessons (20)
Phonecalls (10)	Broadcast Discussions (20)
	Broadcast Interviews (10)
	Parliamentary Debates (10)
	Legal Cross-examinations (10)
	Business Transactions (10)

culture-dependent rules of politeness might be better observable in spontaneous speech, including possible 'vernacular' patterns, than in writing or scripted speech (as also mentioned by Premawardhena, 2007). Consequently, only private and public dialogues (Table 1), a total of 180 files, were taken into account in the present study.

As studies in pragmatics have only been conducted with the help of corpora since 1985 and in only 2% of all the studies published in the *Journal of Pragmatics* according to a recent metastudy (Jucker & Staley, 2017), it seems overdue to use corpora of spoken English for pragmatic research. Focusing on questionnaires or role-plays, previous cross-cultural pragmatic research has directed the speakers' attention to the pragmatic phenomena to be studied, which – even with large sample sizes – could have biased the results as speech did not occur as naturally. A corpus-based approach using ICE data provides researchers with large-scale natural speech data throughout a variety of situations. Though a corpus cannot account for all possible contexts, research in pragmatics can profit immensely from spoken corpora that feature some additional information on factors which might influence how speakers formulate their utterances, such as age and gender.

With regard to the overall corpus design, all national components of ICE follow a common corpus design and are, thus, easily comparable. Nevertheless, cross-varietal comparability can come at the expense of variety-internal variation represented in the national components. For instance, as Mukherjee et al. (2010) point out, in order for national ICE components to be comparable, speakers need to meet certain socio-economic criteria. Hence, it should be kept in mind that most of the speakers in ICE-IND and ICE-SL are likely to be regularly exposed to other varieties of English (for example through higher education and wide media access) and could, consequently, represent a local acrolect more readily than a meso- or basilectal variety.

Moreover, specific search strings are needed for an automatic data retrieval with the help of corpus linguistic tools. If these search strings are based on previous research on requests in, for instance, BrE, predefined search strings involve the risk that possible differences in the use of IndE and SLE speakers go unnoticed. Nevertheless, corpora can still offer valuable insights to politeness and requests in varieties of English that could later on be further investigated with more specialised corpora.

3.2 | Data extraction and annotation

Decisions made during the extraction and annotation process on what denotes a request were based on Flöck (2016), who defines requests as a speech act that 'make[s] somebody do something', and involved only the head act of Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) categorisation. As requests are not easily differentiated from other speech acts such as commands or suggestions, this study works with a continuum of modal auxiliaries moving from command-like requests on the one extreme to suggestion- or offer-like requests on the other extreme (Figure 3).

In a first step, prior to data extraction, foreign speaker material – such as utterances of BrE speakers in the SLE corpus – was automatically detected and deleted from the data. The next step involved a manual corpus-driven approach to identify request patterns in the South Asian English varieties that would have otherwise gone unnoticed: ten files

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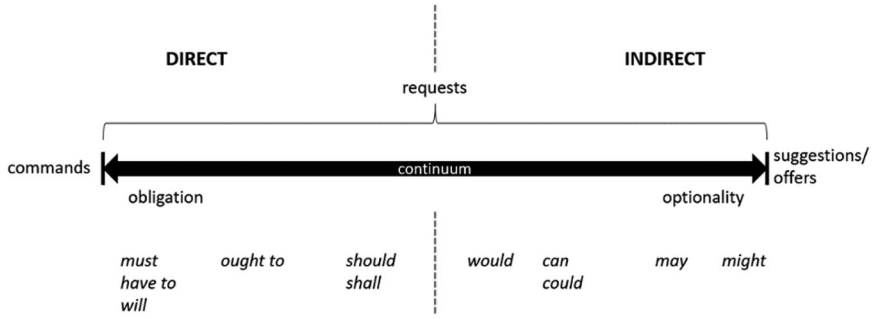

FIGURE 3 Taxonomy of modals denoting (in)directness

of each national component (three face-to-face conversations, two telephone calls, two classroom lessons, two broadcast interviews and one business transaction each) were read thoroughly. Once the context of the speaker's utterance showed that the hearer evaluated it as a request, for example by answering, these request patterns were noted down. Based on their frequency of occurrence in the South Asian components, this led to the identification and inclusion of: (i) (*you*) *see* and (*you*) *look* as in (12); and (ii) *let's/let us* as in (13) as possible request strategies and search strings.

(12) <ICE-IND:S1A-002#159:1:A> Do you have any <,> this statistical uh <,> data <„>
<ICE-IND:S1A-002#160:1:B> *See* I have no idea about that <,> but I saw in paper <,>
<ICE-IND:S1A-002#161:1:A> Yeah yeah <,>
<ICE-IND:S1A-002#162:1:B> Uh nearly four hundred or five hundred members are dead <„>

(13) <ICE-SL:S1A-030#69:1:A> Like *let's* do this let's go and have some fun on the field
<ICE-SL:S1A-030#70:1:B> Yeah

The use of (*you*) *see* and (*you*) *look* as in (12) will be called metaphorical *see/look* throughout the paper as the context of the utterance made clear that the speakers do not aim at the literal meanings, but rather use them metaphorically as pragmatic markers to request their hearers' attention. Moreover, against the background of previous research, the modal auxiliaries *can*, *could*, *will*, *would*, *shall*, *should*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *ought to* and *have to* were included as search strings. Though the latter is not technically a modal auxiliary, it is often included in research on requests as carrying a similar meaning like *must*.

Search hits were then extracted with the help of the corpus-linguistic software AntConc (Anthony, 2020). These hits were then manually investigated for their actual realisation as requests; utterances, such as *So you could still have been deaf […]* (ICE-GB:S1A-075#74:1:A), were excluded from the data. Many utterances needed to be crosschecked within their context as especially indirect requests could have been meant as mere statements. Most unclear instances could be disambiguated in the utterance context, while the remaining cases were discarded.

Finally, the private and public dialogues in all three components yielded 2,148 requests (after the exclusion of data points that did not provide information on GENDER or AGE) which were annotated for a binary dependent variable (DIRECT vs. INDIRECT request, referred to here as response variable) as well as seven single independent variables and six interaction independent variables (also referred to here as (interaction) predictors). Table 2 shows the distribution of (IN)DIRECTNESS across the three varieties. While this allows for a first overview, it essentially represents the influence of only one independent variable (namely VARIETY) on the choice of (IN)DIRECTNESS. Yet, as outlined in the theoretical part of this paper, it is the interplay of various structural, contextual and sociobiographic factors that influence said choice, which is why this study does not involve a monofactorial but a multifactorial analysis.

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TABLE 2 Distribution of direct and indirect requests in the three ICE components

	ICE-GB abs. freq.	ICE-GB rel. freq.	ICE-IND abs. freq.	ICE-IND rel. freq.	ICE-SL abs. freq.	ICE-SL rel. freq.
DIRECT	299	44.76%	396	45.83%	347	56.51%
INDIRECT	369	55.24%	468	54.17%	267	43.49%
Total	668	100%	864	100%	614	100%

For the purpose of this study, I adapt Leech's (2014) categorisation of direct, on-record indirect, non-sentential and off-record indirect request strategies (which – as pointed out above – is representative of Blum-Kulka & Olshtain's (1984) categorisation) with a few adjustments. First, it is outside the scope of this paper and its corpus-based approach to cover non-sentential and off-record indirect request strategies due to the sheer amount of possible realisations. Second, while I agree with Leech in that direct requests do not require any additional cognitive effort, I want to stress the possibility that the modal auxiliaries included in what he calls 'prediction statements' and 'strong obligation statements' do in fact account for a direct request strategy. Following Leech (2014), requests such as *I think we should and you should come to our place okay […]* (ICE-SL:S1A1-039#346:1:B) should thus be categorised as indirect requests. Though this request is realised via a declarative structure, I would suggest that the modal *should* is far more direct than, for example, the modal *could*, which carries the notion of possibility, and is, thus, less direct than the modals *will* or *should* (Fitzmaurice, 2002). As indicated in Examples (14) and (15), there is no reason to assume a difference in the evaluation of (14) and (15) as requests with a high risk of (negative) face loss.

(14) <ICE-GB:S1A-039#93:1:B> […] *you must* let me photograph your baby for my magazine
(15) <ICE-IND:S1A-011#78:1:F> You you have been educated <„> *you should* learn to be independent

Therefore, Figure 3 shows the taxonomy set up for the two levels (DIRECT vs. INDIRECT) of the dependent variable (IN)DIRECTNESS.

In addition to that, occurrences of *let's*/*let us* and literally meant (*you*) *look* and (*you*) *see* have been annotated as DIRECT whereas metaphorical (*you*) *look* and (*you*) *see* have been annotated as INDIRECT.

The levels of the seven independent variables were coded according to the following:

- VARIETY: the three ICE components, Great Britain (GB), India (IND) and Sri Lanka (SL);
- GENDER: the speaker's gender, either female (F) or male (M);
- AGE: the speaker's age, either younger (Y; ≤25) or older (O; ≥26);
- SETTING: the social context the request is uttered in, either private (PRI) or public (PUB), following the ICE corpus design (see Table 1.);
- FACE: whether the request is directed at either positive (POS) or negative (NEG) face wants;
- MITIGATOR: whether (YES or NO) the request includes (one or more) mitigator(s); and
- STRUCTURE: the structural realisation of a request as either declarative (DEC), interrogative (INT) or imperative (IMP)

VARIETY, GENDER and AGE provide self-explanatory sociobiographic factors on the choice of (IN)DIRECTNESS. The speakers' gender and age were provided by the ICE metadata in many cases. Those data points for which information on GENDER or AGE was not provided were excluded from the data, mostly in the parliamentary debates and legal cross-examinations sections.

While the predictors SETTING and FACE represent contextual factors, STRUCTURE and MITIGATOR depict structural factors. Many previous studies have emphasised the importance of social distance for the choice of request strategy. Despite its relevance, social distance could not explicitly be taken into account in the present study because

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information on social distance is only provided for in the metadata of ICE-IND. However, the general assumption that in the private dialogue sections speakers are socially less distant than in the public dialogues sections of ICE supports the inclusion of SETTING as a predictor.

FACE was annotated according to whether the request addresses positive or negative face wants of the interlocutors. Following previous research outlined above, (16) shows a positive face-oriented request and (17) represents a negative face-oriented request. Consequently, requests addressing the interlocutors' wish to be an accepted member of the speech community were annotated as POS and requests referring to the interlocutors' wish to be independent in their decisions were annotated as NEG.

(16) <ICE-IND:S1A-081#162:1:B> Would you like to elaborate on that?
(17) <ICE-SL:S1A-006#434:1:B> I really think you should go <„>

Another important predictor is whether or not one or more mitigators are included to soften the request's intrusive force. Following Flöck's (2016) categorisation of mitigating modifiers outlined above, this paper includes lexical/phrasal mitigators appealing to the hearer's negative and positive face. Mitigators should be especially called for in imperative request constructions as they are assumed to lower the risk of face loss of a bald on-record request.

In order to investigate possible positive correlations between the use of mitigators and imperative requests, the data also needed to be coded for the request's structure – its realisation as an interrogative (INT: Can you close the window?), a declarative (DEC: You could close the window.) or an imperative (IMP: Close the window!). It is not tautological to annotate the data for both imperative structure and direct request because an imperative structure can but does not have to be a direct request. Example (18) shows an imperative structure, yet the speaker does not aim at the literal meaning of *see*, but rather indirectly requests the hearer's compliance.

(18) <ICE-IND:S1B-042#97:1:A> What can be the role of a voluntary organisation vis-à-vis the government institutions <,>?
<ICE-IND:S1B-042#98:1:B> See nobody should ever come to a conclusion that voluntary organisation is going to replace government

This differentiation is furthermore necessary as the same modal auxiliary can be considerably more imposing in declaratives (*You can entertain the kids while I'm away.*) than in interrogatives (*Can you entertain the kids while I'm away?*) since the former leaves less chance for the hearer to opt out than the latter (Leech, 2014, p. 152).

As the theoretical interest of this paper lays in potential regional variation of request realisations, interactions between the predictor VARIETY and the other predictors were coded explicitly. For instance, the interaction predictor VARIETY_STRUCTURE covers all three levels of variety (GB, IND, SL) as well as the three levels of STRUCTURE (DEC, IMP, INT) to investigate whether they have a joint effect on (IN)DIRECTNESS.

4 | STATISTICAL AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

For the statistical analyses of possible significant differences in the realisation of requests across the three varieties, a conditional inference tree (CIT) (Hothorn et al., 2006) and a random forest (RF) (Breiman, 2001) were employed with the help of RStudio. They were furthermore accompanied by partial dependence plots (PDP).

CITs provide an overview of important factors for the dependent variable and profile distributions of the levels of the dependent variable in the light of factor combinations. Inspired by Gries (2020), two types of models were set up: one featuring interaction predictors between VARIETY and the other predictors and one without these interaction predictors. The classification accuracy of the CIT model with interaction predictors (75.07%) is better than that of the CIT model without interaction predictors (73.15%) as well as that of a baseline model (50.04%), which always predicts

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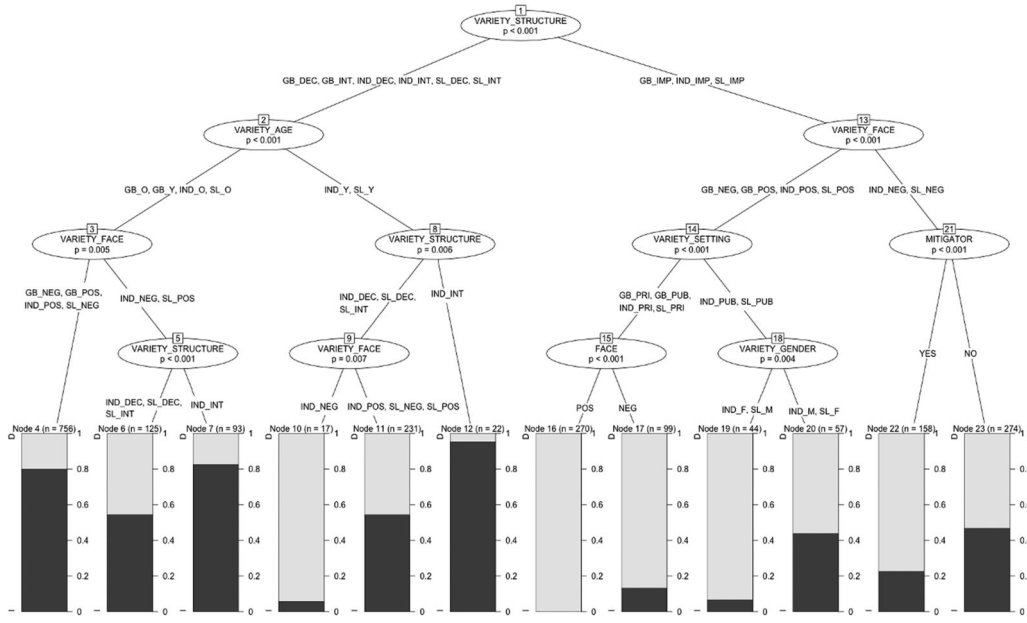

FIGURE 4 Conditional Inference Tree as predicted by the interaction model

the more frequently occurring response variable INDIRECT. As a CIT model with interaction predictors can also provide various deeper insights into possibly significant combinations of factors that would not be visible without these interaction predictors, the findings of the CIT with interactions predictors are reported here.

The most straightforward way of reading the CIT in Figure 4 is to start at the very top with Node 1 that shows the first split according to the interaction predictor VARIETY_STRUCTURE, thus indicating that a combination of the variety of English and the sentence structure used to realise the request is statistically highly significant and the most important factor for the choice of (IN)DIRECTNESS. On the branch to the left are requests realised by declarative or interrogative structures in all three varieties, on the branch to the right are requests realised by imperative structures in all three varieties. While with declarative/interrogative structures the interaction predictor VARIETY_AGE seems to be of importance for further splits in the tree, the most important predictor for the choice of (IN)DIRECTNESS in imperative constructions seems to be VARIETY_FACE. Generally, most declarative/interrogative requests are realised rather indirectly than directly. The outlier (Node 10) indicates that younger IndE speakers realise declarative requests predominantly directly in negative face constructions irrespective of gender or setting. However, a closer look at the data shows no variety-specific or unique request realisation: all requests with this pattern take place in private conversations and the majority of these requests include *you should*, a few include *you will* (Examples (19) and (20)).

(19) *You should* get that. (ICE-IND:S1A-031#163:1:B)
(20) *You will* go to the library now. (ICE-IND:S1A-059#147:1:A)

Imperative requests are mostly realised directly, even more so when including mitigators to soften the intrusive force in IndE and SLE negative face constructions (Node 22). In BrE negative face constructions as well as in positive face constructions in all three varieties, speakers opt for direct constructions in the majority of cases. This comes as a surprise because, based on previous research, one would expect speakers to opt for more indirectness in imperative constructions to be least imposing, especially in public contexts where social distance can be assumed to be higher than in private contexts.

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The CIT further splits along the lines of VARIETY_SETTING (Node 14), with IndE and SLE public requests taking a different split than the remaining SETTING constructions. The former shows a significant gender difference (Node 18): In positive face constructions, female IndE speakers and SLE male speakers tend to realise imperative requests in public settings directly more often than male IndE speakers and female SLE speakers. However, a look at the data shows that this difference is quantitative rather than qualitative as all these requests include *let us* and *let's* (Examples (21)–(24)), possibly to signal group membership according to the speakers' rather positive politeness-oriented culture.

(21) IND_F: *Let us* uh refer to those parts later on (ICE-IND:S1B-008#68:1:A)
(22) SL_M: So with that *let us* move on to <„> the specific metals right (ICE-SL:S1B-016#100:1:A)
(23) IND_M: You know *let's* get this in perspective <,> (ICE-IND:S1B-041#27:1:B)
(24) SL_F: Fine so uh *let's* just do a recap of what we did <,> last week right <„> (ICE-SL:S1B-005#7:1:A)

Private imperative requests in all varieties and BrE public imperative requests are split once more according to the predictor FACE: positive face-oriented imperative requests are exclusively realised directly, negative face-oriented imperative requests are realised indirectly in about 15%.

Again, the majority of positive face-oriented direct private requests are realised with *let's* and *let us* in all three varieties. Yet, while BrE speakers frequently combine *let's* with verbs like *stop* and *take*, IndE and SLE speakers show a markedly frequent use of metaphorical *let's see* and *let's say* compared to BrE (Examples (25)–(27)).

(25) *Let's* stop it for the moment (ICE-GB:S1A-001#50:1:A)
(26) Uh <„> *let's see* if I could talk to her about it <,> (ICE-IND:S1A-038#277:1:B)
(27) *Let's say* you don't have enough <,> money for your third child and you raise the third child […] (ICE-SL:S1A-076#29:1:B)

In sum, the CIT profiles the interaction variable VARIETY_STRUCTURE as central with further splits indicating that imperative requests in all three varieties are more likely to be realised directly and declarative/interrogative requests are rather realised indirectly. The exceptions are younger IndE speakers who realise declarative negative face-oriented requests directly most of the time, yet no structurally unique pattern could be found so that the difference is once again only quantitative in nature. To arrive at more global estimates of relative variable importance, a RF analysis was conducted complementarily.

While small changes with the input data can results in notably different trees, RFs create a forest of trees and put their overall outcome into one predictive model (Chakure, 2019). The advantage is that, with enough trees, this prevents overfitting and adds a certain degree of randomness because each of the trees included takes just a random part of the data into consideration without consistently relying on the most important predictor, but iteratively searching 'for the best feature among a random subset of features' (Donges, 2019). The RF for the data at hand proved to be better when it included interaction predictors (classification accuracy 79.78%) than when it did not (76.25%).

As shown in Figure 5, the RF – like the CIT – profiles the interaction predictor VARIETY_STRUCTURE to be most important. Moreover, it predicts STRUCTURE as an independent variable on its own to have the second highest predictive power on the choice of (IN)DIRECTNESS. VARIETY on its own has least predictive power. All the other predictors that were taken into account for the present study have an influence on the dependent variable, yet neither of the remaining independent variables on their own has as much of an influence on the response variable as any of the interaction predictors. The following PDPs visualise the effects the most important (interaction) predictors have on requests in the random forest while controlling for the impacts of the remaining independent variables.

The PDP shows the marginal effect individual predictors have on the occurrence of indirectness. For instance, with regard to the second most important predictor STRUCTURE, the PDP (Figure 6) confirms the overall direction already indicated by the CIT: In general, declarative and interrogative structures tend to be realised indirectly more often than imperative constructions which, in the majority, are realised directly.

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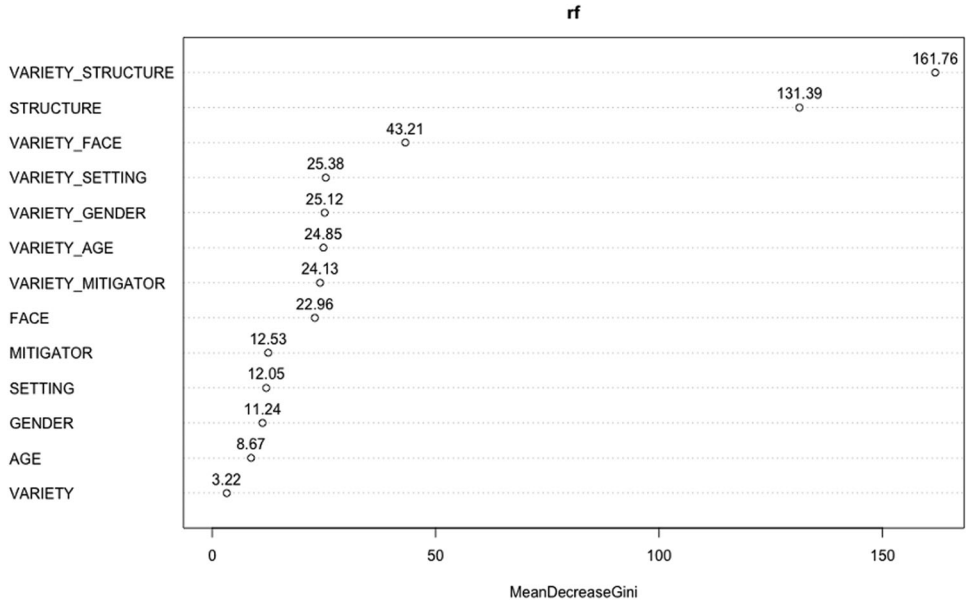

FIGURE 5 Random Forest as predicted by the interaction model

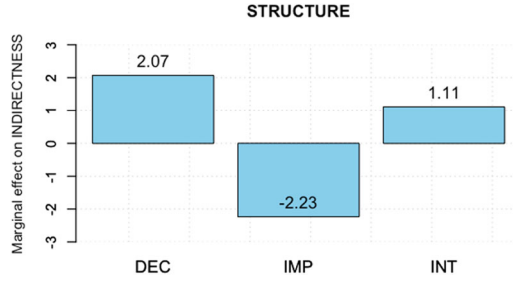

FIGURE 6 Marginal effect of STRUCTURE on (IN)DIRECTNESS [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

A look at the PDP of the interaction predictor VARIETY_STRUCTURE (Figure 7) shows that this observation holds true for all three varieties. Moreover, it seems that BrE and IndE behave similar to each other. Declarative and interrogative structures are associated with indirect requests, whereas in SLE the effect on indirectness of declarative and interrogative constructions is only moderate. However, a look into the data proves that neither BrE nor IndE speakers show a unique way of requestive behaviour in statements or questions: all of them use *you should* and *you will/will you*. In few cases (seven, to be exact), BrE speakers use *ought to* as in *You ought to use them* (ICE-GB:S1A-009#72:1:B), yet due to the few data points this can be neglected.

The interaction predictor VARIETY_FACE (Figure 8) shows a clear preference of SLE speakers to realise positive face-oriented requests directly. A qualitative analysis of the data shows a slightly more frequent use of *shall we* in SLE (Example (28)). *Shall we/we shall* is barely used at all in IndE.

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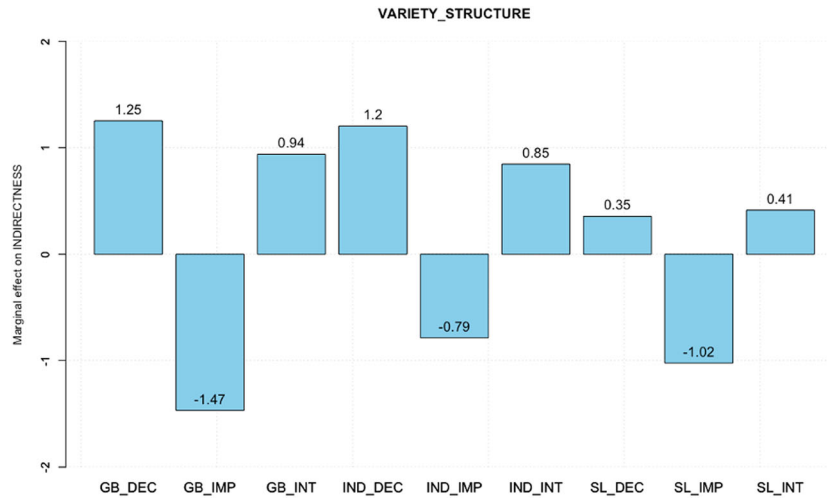
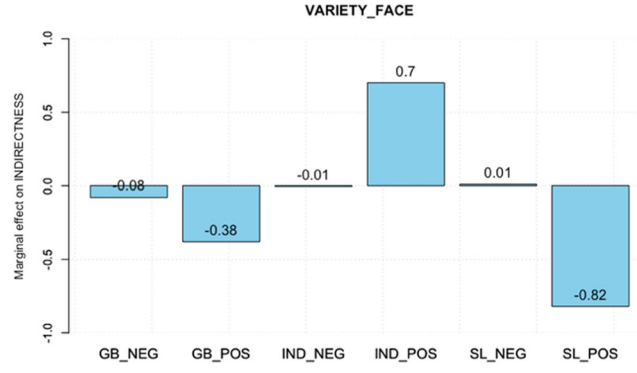


FIGURE 7 Marginal effect of VARTIEY_STRUCTURE on (IN)DIRECTNESS [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

FIGURE 8 Marginal effect of VARTIEY_FACE on (IN)DIRECTNESS [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



(28) *Shall we* order something it's not nice no (ICE-SL:S1A-022#99:1:A)

Moreover, IndE speakers appear to prefer positive face-directed direct request strategies. However, this difference compared to the ICE-GB and the ICE-SL component seems to be a matter of quantity rather than quality, which means that IndE speakers just use *let's*/*let us* much more often than speakers of the other two varieties.

The interaction predictor VARIETY_SETTING (Figure 9) shows a clear preference of BrE speakers to realise both public and private requests indirectly whereas speakers of SLE tend to prefer direct requests in both settings. IndE speakers strongly prefer indirectness in private requests. Again, this preference is accounted for by a notably recurrent use of metaphorical *look* and *see* (Examples (29) and (30)) and *you see* (Example (31)), possibly in order to have the hearer more actively engage in the conversation or to pay attention and try to understand the speaker's point. Though speakers of BrE and SLE use (*you*) *see* and (*you*) *look* in the same way, too, they do so less frequently.

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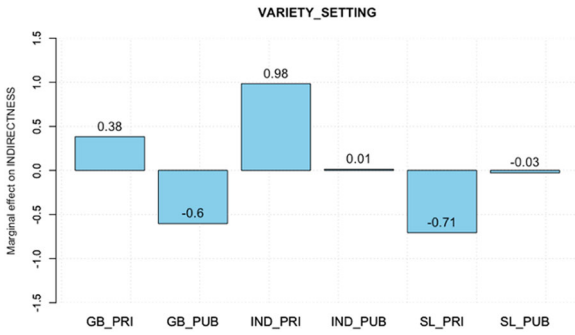

FIGURE 9 Marginal effect of VARTIEY_SETTING on (IN)DIRECTNESS [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

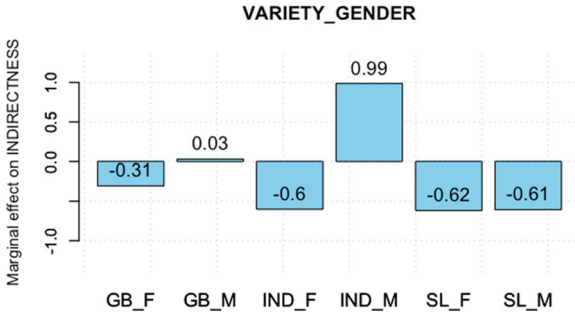

FIGURE 10 Marginal effect of VARTIEY_GENDER on (IN)DIRECTNESS [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

(29) *Look* that is what I dream and I don't <,> that is what I'm telling it out <,> (ICE-IND:S1A-056#190:1:C)

(30) *See* my worry is <,> Ahn <,> that between uh <,> end of this month and <,> uh second week of <,> uh uh what is that uh January <,> (ICE-IND:S1A-094#70:1:B)

(31) *You see* I think uh the problem is that uh <„> most socio-linguists I know <,> particular in the Indian context <,> have opted for socio-linguistic as a soft option <„> (ICE-IND:S1A-082#252:1:B)

As Figure 10 indicates, while there seems to be no preference amongst female BrE speakers for either direct or indirect requests, male speakers tend to use indirect requests. Both SLE female and male speakers and IndE female speakers seem to realise requests directly. The outlier is IndE male speakers; the interaction predictor IND_M has the strongest effect on indirectness. Once again, this is due to the dominance of metaphorical (*you*) *see/(you) look*. This strong effect on indirectness and its realisation by IndE speakers holds with regard to the interaction predictor VARIETY_AGE (Figure 11) once the speakers are categorised as older. A closer look at the data shows that this preference is indeed mainly present in the speech of older male IndE speakers. Younger IndE speakers behave in a way similar to speakers of SLE and all speakers of the South Asian varieties (except for older IndE speakers)

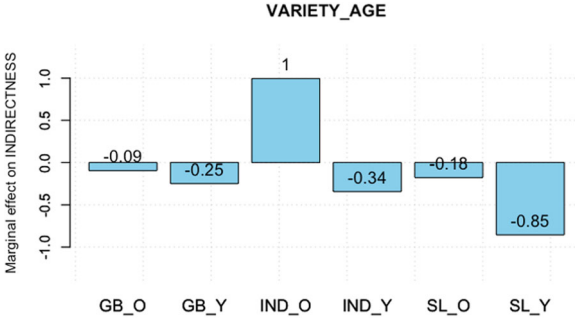

FIGURE 11 Marginal effect of VARTIEY_AGE on (IN)DIRECTNESS [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

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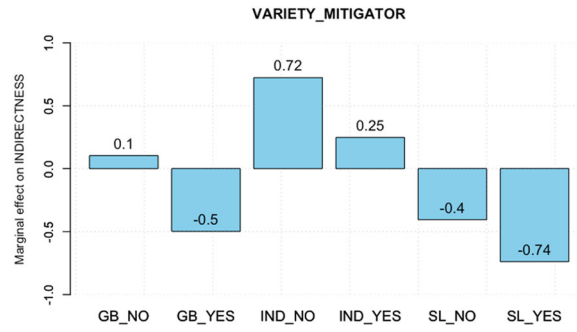

FIGURE 12 Marginal effect of VARTIEY_MITIGATOR on (IN)DIRECTNESS [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

behave differently from speakers of BrE in both age groups. Nevertheless, a four-way interaction predictor (VARIETY_STRUCTURE_AGE_GENDER) would need to be engaged to really prove that this particular request pattern is statistically significant.

The PDP of the interaction predictor VARIETY_MITIGATOR (Figure 12) shows that, in BrE, speakers use a mitigator to soften the intrusive force of their request when the request is realised directly (and presumably more face-threatening, thus calling for mitigation) and they tend to more readily realise the request indirectly if there is no mitigator involved (because less face-threatening constructions do not call for mitigation as much). Both South Asian varieties behave differently than BrE yet not similarly to each other. While IndE speakers tend to realise requests indirectly (caused by the frequent use of metaphorical (*you*) *see*/(*you*) *look* discussed above), SLE speakers realise requests directly (with regular use of *let's*/*let us*), independent of the use of mitigators.

5 | DISCUSSION

The analyses showed two interesting patterns. First, the interaction predictor VARIETY_STRUCTURE seems to be of the greatest importance when it comes to the choice of realising a request either directly or indirectly in all three varieties. With few exceptions that are rather quantitative than qualitative in nature, declarative and interrogative requests are preferably realised indirectly while imperative requests are realised directly. A closer look at the data shows that the latter comes as no surprise because most of the requests take conventionalised forms that are no longer face-threatening. Requests featuring *let's*/*let us* seem to appeal to the South Asian hearers by asking for their compliance and agreement and thus raise the impression that both speaker and hearer are accepted members of the speech community. Though these request constructions are known to speakers of BrE as well, they do not use them as frequently as speakers of both South Asian varieties. Therefore, one could assume that speakers with a South Asian background do indeed value positive face wants more than speakers of BrE with a generally more Western background, but it could also mean that directness is not perceived to be as face-threatening to either face in a South Asian cultural context as it is in a Western context.

Second, and in addition to the first pattern just mentioned, the present study found one particularity amongst IndE speakers. With much higher frequencies than BrE and SLE, IndE makes use of metaphorical (*you*) *see* and (*you*) *look*, possibly in order to gain the hearer's attention. As indicated by the PDPs, most of the relevant metaphorical (*you*) *see* and (*you*) *look* can be found in private requests uttered by older male IndE speakers, but the pattern is also to be found in public discourse. Oftentimes, especially in the latter context, this request pattern goes in hand with the honorific *Sir* (which agrees with earlier research by Jenkins, 2009), so that based on its frequency of occurrence it could be assumed that public discourse still calls for more indirectness and mitigation – despite the fact that imperative requests might generally be more acceptable in South Asian varieties. However, the use of *Sir* was also present in the private data. Consequently, the fact that a request is uttered in a private context does not mean that the social distance between the speakers is naturally low. In addition to that, it has to be mentioned that due to missing information on GENDER

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and/or AGE in the metadata of parliamentary debates and legal cross-examinations, a possibly significant difference between private and public dialogues may become less apparent.

Though suggesting that it could be more usual for requests in a public context to be indirect and for requests in a private context to be more direct represents an Anglo-Saxon centric point of view, the present data leads to the assumption that this holds true for all three varieties. This outcome might, however once again, be due to the fact that both ICE-IND and ICE-SL involve mostly acrolectal speech, which is assumed to be closer to a 'standardised' variety of English whereas meso- or basilectal IndE and SLE might have yielded more unique request patterns, especially in private contexts.

Moreover, the ICE corpus does not include non-verbal politeness markers that could replace verbal acknowledgement, which could have influenced the outcome with regard to SLE speakers. As Premawardhena (2007) mentions, Sinhala has several non-verbal politeness markers: Gestures or body language, such as conscious smiles, signal respect towards the hearer and sometimes replace a verbal acknowledgement. As gestures and body language are usually not represented in corpus data, some of the meaning transmitted from a Sinhala sociocultural background to SLE might get lost. This is certainly something that needs to be kept in mind when evaluating the results of the analyses; there are possible influential factors that cannot be covered with the present corpus-based approach.

Last but not least it should be noted that speakers of South Asian varieties of English – and 'non-native' varieties of English in general – could have less politeness and request strategies at their disposal in English because, in a context in which speakers share mother tongue strategies, they do not need the full range of strategies in English. Therefore, patterns present in L1s, such as Hindi or Sinhala, might not necessarily transfer into English, so that most of the request strategies of all three varieties investigated might appear to be rather similar.

6 | CONCLUSION

While earlier research on requesting behaviour focused on 'native' varieties of English, the present study aimed at investigating possible unique requesting patterns in IndE and SLE compared to their historical input variety BrE. Following results of previous studies, BrE speakers should tend to realise requests – especially negative face-directed requests – indirectly since, in Westernised contexts, the more indirect the request, the less face-threatening and the more polite the request is likely to be perceived and, hence, the more successful the request's outcome. The present study shows that this assumption holds true for declarative and interrogative requests in all three varieties investigated while imperative requests appear to be realised directly significantly more often. Consequently, differences in the usage patterns of requests by speakers of the two South Asian varieties as compared to speakers of BrE cannot be attested straight away. A closer look at the data indicates that this is due to the fact that most imperative requests take a presumably conventionalised form in all three varieties. Therefore, it can be speculated that either imperative requests are conventionalised in IndE and SLE to a similar degree as in BrE, or IndE and SLE speakers feel less of a need to realise imperative requests indirectly due to their non-Westernised cultural background.

While most of the differences in request patterns between the three varieties investigated are rather quantitative than qualitative, the data of the present study shows an overwhelming and preferred use of indirectness amongst IndE speakers in imperative requests. This quantitative difference is qualitatively motivated, mostly represented in older male IndE speech and the use of metaphorical (*you*) *see* and (*you*) *look*. Both the quantitative and the qualitative analysis lead to the assumption that older male IndE speakers exhibit a requesting pattern that is not unique to South Asian Englishes per se, but its recurrent use among said speakers certainly deserves attention. Therefore, the present study can attest that the factors STRUCTURE, AGE and GENDER in interaction with the factor VARIETY (as well as STRUCTURE as a predictor on its own) play an important role in guiding the speakers' choice of realising a request as direct or indirect – at least in IndE.

Avenues for future research concern research methods on the one hand and statistical methods on the other hand. First, though this study involved an initial corpus-driven approach, possibly unique requesting strategies of IndE and

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SLE speakers might have gone unnoticed. Therefore, an initial questionnaire survey, asking speakers for subjectively perceived unique ways of requesting could lead to search strings that could then be included in another corpus study. Second, ICE-IND is the only of the three ICE components used in this study to feature metadata on social distance between the speakers, possibly to distinguish private conversations with high familiarity between speakers and those with low familiarity, as it might be a factor influencing the choice of realising a request as direct or indirect. Having this information provided for the BrE and the SLE speakers as well would open up new possibilities as to be able to judge possible influential factors such as the weight of the request's imposition if familiarity is high/low. Third, based on hearer reactions, one could investigate if the inclusion of mitigators does actually lead to a more acceptable request following the mitigator in the different varieties. Last but not least, regarding statistical methods, as the integration of interaction predictors has proven fruitful in this study, future research could include further investigations of possibly significant interactions of independent variables. For instance, a multifactorial model involving three-way or even four-way interactions might provide additional interesting insights into the data if more factors were included.

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